

Catharsis by DBSean

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Summary: Four years after his supposed death at the hands of the Demogorgon, Brenner returns to Hawkins with a bold new plan to take control of Eleven once and for all. He should never have come back.

Catharsis

"Catharsis"

A/N: That's right, I'm back writing "Stranger Things" fanfiction for the first time in eight months. But hey, better late than never, right?

Fair warning, this story is somewhat dark and has very little in the way of romance, as opposed to the majority of my usual Mileven work. Just a head's up!

Mike Wheeler woke to find his head was pounding.

What happened?, he thought. *What time is it? Where am I? And...what's going on?*

He had been riding his bike through the streets of Hawkins, last he remembered, on his way home after spending the better part of the evening with El. Junior year of high school had just begun, and it was already proving to be difficult for them both; book reports, history essays, science fair projects, calculus homework, and all within the first two weeks! As such, Mike had spent most of his time afterschool hanging out with El in the cabin so the two could work on their homework together, albeit under the watchful eye of Hopper.

Mike remembered he hadn't quite reached Maple Street yet when his memory began to become blurry. He remembered something about a black van, or a black car...some kind of black vehicle. Tires screeching. He had jumped the curb to get out of the way, and when he did...

Nothing. As though the void had swallowed him whole.

Groaning in discomfort, Mike tried looking around to see where he was, but found only darkness despite the fact his eyes were wide open. He was restrained to what felt like a metal table, albeit one sitting at an eighty degree angle, so that he was almost fully upright, his arms and legs bound by leather straps. Worse still, there was a

strong and unpleasant scent in his nose, and his mouth and nostrils were slightly damp, as though someone had placed a wet washcloth over his face.

Chloroform, he realized with a start, finally recognizing the odor and the reason for his pounding headache. *Hopper was right. And that means –*

Mike didn't have the chance to finish his thought before a door opened somewhere in front of him, and the room he was in was suddenly flooded with light so bright it almost caused him to cry out in pain. He heard voices in the background, and footsteps, but his vision was still so blurry that he could make out nothing except for a single silhouette which appeared to be growing larger and larger with every second.

No, not larger. *Closer*. Someone was walking up to him. A moment later, Mike's vision finally cleared, and everything suddenly came into focus.

He was, indeed, strapped to a metal table in the center of a room that looked very much like a doctor's office, one lit by painfully bright white light. Two or three men in suits and one in a white lab coat were scurrying about, but the one standing directly in front of Mike was clearly their leader, and the sight of him caused Mike's heart to literally skip a beat.

"Hello, Michael," said the man with the white hair and the cold eyes. "It's been some time since last we saw one another. Do you remember me, I wonder?"

"Yeah, I remember you," Mike answered softly, his voice raspy thanks to his dry throat. "I was really hoping you were Demogorgon chow, but you're looking pretty good for a dead guy, Brenner."

Indeed, Dr. Martin Brenner, former head of Hawkins Lab and the leader of the supposed 'Department of Energy,' stood in front of Mike, dressed in his own white lab coat and with a gentle and almost fatherly smile on his face. The man looked exactly as he had four years ago, without a hair out of place or a single scar to commemorate the fact that the last time Mike saw him, he had been

next in line on the Demogorgon's menu.

Well, at least now I know what's going on, Mike thought to himself, trying to ignore the pang of fear in his chest and the boiling rage he felt bubbling up within him.

"Where am I?" he asked out loud, coughing slightly.

"You're safe," Brenner answered calmly, offering him no further information. He pulled out a bottle of water and unscrewed the cap. "Here, you must be thirsty."

Though Mike had some reservations about drinking the water Brenner offered him – it could have been drugged, after all, or worse – his thirst was simply too great to ignore. As such, he gladly accepted the water as Brenner pushed it to his lips, and he drank until the entire bottle was empty and his throat felt less like sandpaper.

"That's better," Brenner said at last, actually looking a little apologetic. "I am sorry we have to meet again under such unpleasant circumstances, Michael. The chloroform, the restraints, it must all be very uncomfortable."

"I've been through worse," Mike told him honestly, frowning as he did so. "I'm sorry we have to meet again at all. I was *really* hoping you were dead."

"There's that surly adolescent attitude I've heard so much about," Brenner commented with a smile, not looking angry or impatient in the slightest. "Loathe as I am to disappoint you, here we are, both just as alive as the other. And I imagine you know why?"

Mike nodded. "You want El."

"I want *Eleven*," Brenner corrected him, his smile faltering for the first time since Mike had come to. "That's why you're here, Michael. That's why you're still alive. Because I need you."

"Well, *loathe* as I am to disappoint you," Mike responded sardonically, silently enjoying the way Brenner frowned upon hearing Mike use his own words against him, "you might as well kill me or knock me back

out because I'm not telling you anything. Except maybe where to stick that haircut of yours."

To Mike's surprise, Brenner simply smiled in response.

"Actually, Michael, I don't need you to tell me anything," the older man stated, leaning in close enough that Mike could see into his cold and soulless eyes. "I already know where to find Eleven – or *Jane Hopper*, as you and your little friends refer to her. I've known for months."

"Then what the hell do you need me for?" Mike asked, practically growling.

Again, Brenner smiled. "Leverage. I understand you think very little of me, Michael, but I am a *very* smart man. That isn't pride speaking; it's simple fact. I know Eleven will never return to me willingly, but with the life of her beloved *Michael Wheeler* on the line...I am sure she will make the right decision."

"You mean you're using me as *bait*?" Mike asked, as if looking for clarification.

"*Leverage*," Brenner corrected him. "But...yes."

For a moment, neither Mike nor Brenner spoke. They merely stared at one another, looking the other in the eyes, as though waiting for the other to make a move. The other men in the room continued to move about, setting up machines or preparing themselves for the next phase of Brenner's plan, none of them speaking as they did so. It was Mike who finally broke the silence between them, speaking not in anger but in complete and utter disbelief:

"You fucking idiot."

Brenner hadn't been expecting that, as evidenced by the way both of his eyebrows shot up and his eyes widened in both shock and anger. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Wheeler?"

"You've had *four years* to come up with a plan, and *this* is the best you could do?" Mike asked, smiling in disbelief despite himself and his situation. "Let me guess what you're gonna do next, you're gonna tell

El where to find me, right? But she has to come alone and without using her powers or you'll kill me. Then you'll make her agree to surrender herself to keep me alive. That sound about right?"

Brenner did not speak, but his silence told Mike everything he needed to know.

"This is a *bad idea*," Mike repeated, speaking slowly as though he felt the need to explain everything in detail to the mad scientist before him. "This is probably the worst idea you've ever had, and I'm sure there have been a *ton*. Honestly, Brenner, if I were you, I would let me go right now and just get the *hell* out of Hawkins before it's too late."

"And why is *that*, Mr. Wheeler?" Brenner finally asked, frowning darkly.

"Because as powerful as you remember El being," Mike went on, "you have no idea how much *more* powerful she is *now*."

As if on cue, the lights in the room suddenly began to flicker on and off. Before Brenner could so much as question it, however, he was interrupted by the sound of gunfire in the hallway beyond that caused him, Mike, and all of the other men in the room to suddenly look up.

Though no one could see what was happening in the hallway, the sounds of conflict were loud enough that there was no mistaking them. What began as a few gunshots turned into *many* gunshots, and soon the walls themselves were shaking with the sounds of minor explosions elsewhere in the building. The men in suits surrounding Mike and Brenner immediately pulled out their firearms and aimed them directly at the doorway, waiting for their moment to strike.

Then came the screaming.

The sounds of gunfire faded away, to be replaced by howls of agonizing pain. A sickening crunching sound followed each scream, oftentimes cutting off the cry before it even reached its peak, and each one caused a shiver to run down Brenner's spine. Men – dozens of men, it sounded like – screamed and hollered in anguish, one after

the other, each of them closer and closer to the room in which Mike found himself restrained.

And then, as suddenly as the screaming and shooting started, it stopped.

For a moment, there was silence. Mike saw Brenner looking back and forth between the three suited men standing in front of the doorway, their guns in their hands and sweat upon their brow. The single doctor in the room was cowering behind the metal table Mike was restrained in and whimpering like a child, as though that would help him.

Suddenly, the door handle began to turn.

The men with guns opened fire the moment they saw the handle move, shooting into the metal door with wild abandon, their fear overriding every aspect of their training. It didn't take long before all of them had emptied their clips into the metal door, having succeeded in doing nothing but wasting their bullets.

As everyone in the room watched, the door finally opened, revealing a single figure standing in the hallway, completely unharmed.

"I really don't mean to be annoying," Mike suddenly spoke, causing yet another shiver to run down Brenner's spine, "but I *did* warn you."

There, standing in the open doorway, was El.

At sixteen, El was just under five and a half feet in height, but the aura of power surrounding her form made her seem so much larger. Her long, curly hair was wild and her clothes were splattered with blood, but her expression was one of calm intensity and determination, the look of one who does not doubt their abilities, but only the extent to which they can *control* them.

To Brenner and his men, the girl was like a monster out of hell, a fierce goddess of rage and vengeance come to smite them for their sins.

To Mike, she was simply the most beautiful girl in the world.

El turned first to the three men with the empty guns standing in front of her, lifting a single hand and then clenching it into a fist. Their heads exploded, sending chunks of brain and bone flying in every direction. The doctor hiding behind Mike screamed, but his fearful cry was cut short when El telekinetically snapped his neck from across the room.

Brenner stood frozen in the center of the room, his clothes splattered in the blood and brains of his men, staring at the young woman before him with an expression complete and utter terror. With a simple wave of El's hand, he was tossed aside and sent flying into the nearby wall.

"Took you long enough," Mike said jokingly as the leather straps restraining him to the metal table undid themselves and then fell away, allowing him to stand back up on his own two feet.

"Mouth-breather," El responded with a small smile as she walked across the room and placed a hand on his cheek. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine," Mike told her, smiling right back at her. "Just a headache from the chloroform. Thanks for saving me."

"Always," El replied before leaning in and capturing Mike's lips in a kiss. If Mike noticed or minded the fact that her hands and clothes were covered in blood, he didn't say anything, and simply kissed her right back.

They finally pulled apart when they heard Brenner groan in the corner. The doctor looked up at them with fear and panic in his eyes, like a cornered rabbit would look upon a pair of hungry wolves closing in on their prey.

"Eleven," he finally said, scrambling to stand. "My dear Eleven – mmm!"

With a muffled cry, Brenner felt his mouth being telekinetically shut against his will, and with such force that he could feel his teeth grinding against one another. He tried to pry his lips apart with his own two hands, but to no avail; El was simply too strong for him.

"You don't get to speak," El told him from across the room, finally turning away from Mike and granting Brenner her full attention. "I'm not listening to you anymore. Now you will listen to me. Do you understand?"

Brenner nodded. He couldn't do anything else.

"You...ruined my life," El began, glaring at Brenner with such hatred in her eyes that the doctor felt like her look alone could make his heart stop beating in his chest. "You stole me from my mother. You turned me into a weapon. You took everything away from me. I should hate you. I *do* hate you. But I never went looking for you. For four years, I never went looking for you. Do you know why?"

Brenner shook his head.

"Because you were my Papa," El answered softly, tears gleaming at the edges of her eyes. "I loved you. I *forgave* you. And all you had to do...was stay away."

Brenner's eyes widened as El took a single step towards him and he felt the air around him suddenly come to life with the crackling of static electricity and telekinetic energy. The air itself felt heavy, *dangerous*, as though it harbored a thousand darkling creatures just *begging* to reach out and taste his flesh.

"You could have moved on," El continued, taking another powerful step forward. "You could have hidden, or run, or started over. I would never have known. I would never have looked for you. But instead...you came back. You *spied* on me. You *hurt* me. You took *Mike* from me."

"I told you this was a bad idea," Mike said as he looked over at Brenner, no longer smiling but actually appearing somewhat apologetic, as though he knew what was coming next and wished it upon no one, not even his worst enemy. "For such a smart guy, this was pretty stupid."

"I want to let you go," El went on, gentle tears now staining her cheeks as she looked upon the man who had been her father figure for most of her life. "I want to let you leave. But I can't. You came

back. Which means you will come back again. You will take *Mike* again. I can't let you."

Brenner tried to shout as he felt his entire body being telekinetically lifted into the air, but his jaw was still fused shut, meaning nothing came out but a muffled cry. His eyes were wide and his heart was pounding as El levitated him several feet above the ground; he struggled frantically, his arms and legs thrashing about, but to no avail.

As Brenner watched, Mike walked up to El and took her by the one hand that wasn't being used to telekinetically levitate Brenner. Their fingers intertwined, and Mike's hand squeezed El's, as if reassuring her of his presence.

"Are you sure?" he asked her softly, not a hint of judgment in his voice.

"Yes," El answered after a moment, sniffing lightly, tears in her eyes as she glared at Brenner. "Sure."

If Brenner could have screamed, he would have, as that was when he began feeling pain greater than he had ever before experienced in his entire life. His blood boiled, his brain pounded in his skull, and every pain receptor in his body suddenly burst into flame all at once. It took everything in him not to squeeze his eyes closed as he felt nothing but pure agony wrack his form, and instead forced himself to look down at the girl he once called 'Eleven' as she used her powers to tear his body apart from the inside out.

"You could have stayed away," she reminded him one last time, as a single drop of blood began to trickle out of her nose. "Goodbye, Papa."

Then everything went black and Brenner knew no more.

A/N: Dark enough for you? Comments and reviews appreciated, as always!